DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 840 SO 011 053

AUTHOR Rostetter, David; Deluca, Nicholas
TITLE Conflict Sociology-A Perspective for Organizational Theory.
PUB DATE 28 Mar 78
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Toronto, Ontario, March 28-31, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Conflict; Data Analysis; Data Collection; Educational History; Information Needs; Literature Reviews; *Models; *Organizational Theories; Productive Thinking; *Research Methodology; Research Needs; Research Problems; *Research Utilization; *Sociology; State Departments of Education; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS New York

ABSTRACT

This paper reports research which utilizes a qualitative approach in order to document and describe the process of complex organizational conflict. Qualitative research methodology and conflict sociology can be relevant to analysis of organizational processes. The qualitative approach is interpreted to include techniques such as observation, event analysis, and process documentation. Conflict sociology, based upon "Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society," by Ralf Dahrendorf, suggests that a theoretical model should direct research and pose questions which will make sense out of a social phenonemon. Other sociologists who have contributed to development of the conflict model include Thomas Eliot, Gerhard Lenski, Robert North, Wilmer Cody, Frank W. Lutz, Randall Collins, and Robert Brumbaugh. An example of analytical contributions of a qualitative research design is a study conducted in 1974-75 to assess mandated change in teacher education and certification in New York state. Data were collected regarding attitudes and activities of participants in the teacher training program. An explanatory theory, based upon research by Dahrendorf and Collins, was constructed to explain program development. Findings indicated that mandated change has a high potential for generating conflict, selective involvement and non-participation of participants, and redistribution of power. The conclusion is that a theory based on conflict sociology and qualitative methods served to clearly explain participant behavior and organizational processes in the case of teacher preparation in New York state. (Author/DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED157840

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

David Rostetter

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

CONFLICT SOCIOLOGY - A PERSPECTIVE FOR ORGANIZATONAL THEORY

by

DAVID ROSTETTER - U.S.O.E.
BUREAU of EDUCATION for
the HANDICAPPED

NICHOLAS DELUCA - STATE
UNIVERSITY of NEW YORK at
ALBANY

Presented at the Annual AERA
Conference - March 28, 1978

SO 011 053

"Conflict Sociology - A Perspective
for Organizational Theory"

This paper will focus on two subject areas which are fundamental to the development and utilization of relevant organizational theory. These two broad subject areas are qualitative research methodology and Conflict Sociology as a productive model for the analysis of complex organizational processes. In order to address these two subject areas each will be addressed individually. Subsequently both subject areas will be dealt with more specifically as utilized in recent research involving the analysis of inter and intra organizational conflict. Through the utilization of this framework the two methodological and theoetical areas can be explained and then "grounded" in actual work which utilized both approaches.

This paper will also, most importantly, address the issue of how both approaches can be used most effectively through an inductive ethnographic research process rather than the more commonly utilized hypothetico-deductive research process. It is a basic assumption of the authors that the inductive ethnographic approach, combined with qualitative methodologies and the theoretical perspective of Conflict Sociology provides a comprehensive model for the analysis of complex organizational phenomena.

The Qualitative Approach

The countless arguments, endless debates, and the professional biases relative to qualitative vs. quantitative approaches are suf-

ficient to turn an aspiring social scientist into an educator (of all things). One has only to venture into any graduate school and examine the course offerings to see the dichotomy which many scientists wish to perpetuate relative to the two techniques. In fact, a hierarchy is even erected relative to the two approaches in many schools of education. The statistical, deductive, tight, behavioral designs appear to be granted much status in the educational research community. In fact they are accorded so much status that they become the "measuring stick" for successful research.

Apparently, the very productive and useful work of many sociologist, anthropologists, psychologists, and organizational theorists who utilized ethnographic techniques such as observation, event analysis, and process documentation are not considered "tight enough". Obviously, such is not the case and the educational community is becoming more aware of the value of qualitative approaches. Therefore, this paper reports research which utilizes a qualitative approach in order to document and describe the process of complex organizational conflict.

The Conflict Perspective: A Model for Sociological Analysis

In 1957, Ralf Dahrendorf published a book entitled Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society. Dahrendorf proposed a model for the conceptualization of society as an alternative to the predominant model of structural-functionalism. According to Dahrendorf the structural-functional model of society was "Utopian" in nature and as such failed to provide an adequate model for the conceptualization of sociological problems, theory, and research. His objections to struc-

ral-functional theorists were too numerous to detail here. However, some of Dahrendorf's criticisms are worth mentioning as they can aid in gaining a clearer picture of his model.

In "Out of Utopia--Toward A Reorientation of Sociological Analysis" (1958), Dahrendof delineates his major objections to structural- functional theorists. Among these objections is his contention that structural-functional theorists are Utopian and as such cannot, and do not, perceive society in a way which will generate appropriate sociological research. Another of his objections is that Utopians seek to make a false distinction between theory and research. To Dahrendorf the two are inseparable.

> Above all this conception implies that sociological research and sociological theory are two separate activities which it is possible to divide and join. I do not believe that is so. (p. 115)

Dahrendorf continues by stating that if the position that theory and research is separable is accepted, we will have little success at examining problems. What Dahrendorf means here is that we should be interested in the explanation of problems. He says "at the beginning of every scientific investigation there should be a puzzle" (p. 117).

Dahrendorf also indicates that the "equilibrium" model is frequently employed. Regarding the equilibrium model Dahrendorf states:

> It may be my personal bias, but I can think of many more problems to which the social system does not apply than those to which it does. (p. 120)

Dahrendorf's rather strong statement and objections to the structral-functionalist approach have been summarized by William Chamblis (1973).

Chamblis delineates the assumptions of the structural-functionalist approach as follows:

1. Every society is a relatively persisting configuration of elements.
2. Every society is a well-integrated configuration of elements.
3. Every element in a society contributes to its functioning.
4. Every society rests on the consensus of its members. (1973, p. 20)

In addition to the objections cited above it is these fundamental assumptions of the structural-functional model which Dahrendorf strongly denounces. In their place Dahrendorf offers four antithetical assumptions:

1. Every society experiences at every moment social conflicts, social conflict is ubiquitous.
2. Every society is subjected at every moment to social change, social change is ubiquitous.
3. Every element in a society contributes to its change.
4. Every society rests on the constraint of it's members.

These fundamental assumptions form the basis for the conflict perspective. The conflict perspective forms a model or paradigm for our understanding of a phenomenon. However, a model is not a theory. It is a point of view. As such it cannot be proven wrong. A model directs our research in a general way and suggests questions to be asked which will make some sense out of a social phenomenon. It is in this manner that the conflict perspective should be used.

From this broad point of reference which forms the conflict model, other researchers and theorists have discussed conflict. In "The Nature of Society" Gerhard Lenski (1973) proposes that conflict is an important element in every society. He states that many of the "systems theorists" tend to ignore or

play down the element of conflict in order to seek equilibrium models. Lenski points out that throughout history all societies have been involved in conflict as it is impossible for the individuals and groups within a society to agree on every issue which confronts them (p. 39).

Robert North (1969) discusses conflict in a study on violence. He state that conflict

> emerges whenever two or more persons seek to possess the same object, occupy the same (physical or status) space, play the same role, maintain incompatible goals or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes, and so forth. (p. 3)

As Dahrendorf implies, it is difficult to envision society as not involved in one of these types of conflict perpetually. This is true on the individual, group and national level.

The amount of iterature in education regarding conflict in schools is extremely sparse. Most discussions of conflict pertain to collective bargaining. There are, however, some statements regarding conflict in education which can prove of interest to us.

Wilmer S. Cody (1974) discusses conflict in terms of governance, accountability, and evaluation in education. He states that conflict is a critical element in the processes involved in school administration. Thomas Eliot (1959) says that school governance is founded in two apparent conflicts in American Education. These conflicts are the struggle between the public's fight to educational self-determination, and the professional's need for wide range of decision perogatives. These two contentions that conflict exist in the schools, and may even be inherent, lend support to the use of the conflict perspective.

Another concept used in the analysis of conflict was proposed by Frank W. Lutz (1969). Lutz uses the concept of territoriality and defines it as "cognitive space." He utilizes this term to analyze teacher-administrator relationships, implying that conflict between the two groups is often a function of violations by one group of the other's "cognitive space" (p. 82). Robert Brumbaugh (1970) argues that the concept of territoriality, as defined by Lutz, is a critical concept in understanding organizational functioning and interactions (p. 98).

The description and discussion of the conflict perspective is presented here as a means of conceptualizing the problems relative to complex organizational theory. As stated earlier, the literature presented defines a broad model from which the researcher can conduct his inquiry. It is not intended as a basis for generating specific hypotheses or research questions as little is known of most phenomenon under study.

The methodological qualitative approaches, combined with the conflict model can combine as a formidable approach to the development of useful and relevant theory. Such theory is grounded in the event and is utilized to explain the event. Using this approach the theory is utilized as a broad perspective and then is tested against the specific processes described. Theory can then be used to explain what has occurred which is the primary function of theory. Following is a description of a study which utilized qualitative methods and Conflict Sociology.

An Analysis of Inter and Intra Organizational Conflict

This research focused on mandated change and its impact upon an institution of higher education (IHE). The mandated change which this study analyzed was the Competency Based Teacher Education (CBTE) mandate which the New York State Education Department Division of Teacher Education and Certification (SED) attempted to implement in 1974-75. The study used an ethnographic, qualitative research design to describe the event studied. The "Conflict Perspective" as delineate by Dahrendorf (1957) and Collins (1975) formed the theoretical framework for the analysis of the event.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What are the characteristics of the development of a CBTE program in an institution of higher education in New York State as it responded to a state-wide mandate for the development of CBTE prgrams?

The movement toward CBTE in New York State became an actuality when the SED, Division of Teacher Education and Certification established a deadline for program proposal submission. Sixty IHE's, which represented a total of 146 teacher education programs, were required to submit CBTE program proposals on or before February 1, 1975. Due to the wide variety of institutional settings and characteristics represented by this group of IHEs responses to the state mandate took varying forms. However, despite the wide

diversity of institutional settings and characteristics, SED was cofronted with the problem of developing and applying standardized state-wide criteria upon which to base its decisions regarding program registration.

It is from these two phenomena: (1) the variations in institutional settings and characteristics, and (2) the SED's state-wide mandate and criteria for program development and registration; that the problem; which this study addresses arose. This study, conducted an extensive analysis of the development of a CBTE program in an IHE which did not receive program registration.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to: (1) identify and describe characteristics involved in the development of CBTE program, and (2) analyze these identified and described characteristics from the perspective of intra- and inter-organizational conflict, in an institution of higher education as it responded to the state-wide mandate for CBTE program development.

FOCUS

This study focused upon one IHE as it attempted to develop its CBTE program. This IHE was chosen because:

(1) It represents a non-typical case as it is one of the few institutions which did not receive program registration (only four of the sixty did not receive registration).

(2) This IHE was apparently unique in the type and amount of conflict it generated in its attempt to develop a CBTE program.

(3) This IHE has a program for the preparation of elementary education teachers which is the largest teacher education program involved in the February 1975 deadline.

(4) The remaining institutions were currently under study through a state-wide survey of institutional development of CBTE programs.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study was based on several assumptions:

1. The phenomenon investigated is unique in its configuration. By this we mean the state-wide mandate for CBTE is unique in its scope and effect.

2. The institutional response to the sate-wide mandate is unique as this is a new form of external impetus for change.

3. A descriptive account of the processes involved in the IHE and its consortia must be provided in order to interpret the actions of the individuals and groups involved.

A conceptual framework and methodology for the analysis of social settings which met the criteria stated above has been proposed by John Lofland (1971). Lofland's conceptual framework was utilized here as the methodology necessary for the conduct of this study. Lofland was chosen for two reasons: (1) his methodology has been developed to describe the characteristics of a social phenomenon, and (2) his methodology affords the flexibility to analyze a social setting, while also providing specificity in the collection and analysis of data.

Lofland states that a social event can be divided, along a continuum, into six units of analysis. These units of analysis are:

1. Acts
2. Activities
3. Meanings
4. Participants
5. Relationships
6. Setting

These units of analysis move from microscopic (acts) to macroscopic (setting). By obtaining data within these categories the entire social event can be described. Lofland defines these units of analysis as follows:

1. Acts: Action in a situation that is temporarily brief, constituting only a few seconds, minutes or hours.

2. Activities: Action in a setting of more major duration --days, weeks, months--constituting significant elements of person's involvements.

3. Meanings: The verbal productions of participants that define and direct action.

4. Participation: Person's holistic involvement, or adaption to, a situation or setting under study.

5. Relationships: Interrelationships among several persons, considered simultaneously.

6. Setting: The entire setting under study considered as the unit of analysis.

DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were utilized in order to obtain data needed to describe the IHE response to the state mandate. They are based on Lofland's framework for the analysis of a social setting.

1. What were the acts of participants during the development of the CBTE program?

2. What were the actions taken by groups during the development of the CBTE program?

3. What were the meanings attributed to acts and actions of participants by themselves and others?

4. In what way did participants become involved or not involved in the development of the CBTE program?

5. What were the relationships of individuals and groups as they were involved in the development of the CBTE program?

6. What was the setting in which the development of the CBTE program took place (historical, institutional, social, and political environment)?

ANALYSIS

The basic theoretical perspective for the analysis of the CBTE program development is conflict theory. The primary source of theoretical information was Conflict Sociology Toward An Explanatory Science by Randall Collins (1975).

The purpose of this study is consistent with Collins' assertions. The attempt was made to utilize some of Collins' explanatory theory dealing with organizations to explain the complex phenomena documented and described. Thus an attempt was made to apply and generate explanations of a complex phenomena based upon experience

There are three distinct characteristics of the process described by the data. They are:

1. Conflict and Coercion. The utilization and dynamics of power.

2. Differing goals and approaches to the solution of problems causing conflict.

3. Conflict within organizations affecting the ability to function in the collaborative effort.

Each characteristic, and the phenomena it is characteristics of, was explained in terms of available theory and the generation of theory where appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of the study are:

1. Mandated change has a high potential for generating conflict.

2. Where change is mandated, attempts at collaborative effort are impaired.

3. Mandated program development involves the processes of change and conflict.

4. Organizational collaborative efforts involve the distribution and utilization of power.

5. Mandated change can result in attempts to avoid participation.

6. Madated change results in counter-aggression where resources are available.

7. Mandated change can result in non-participation of parties in the collaborative effort when resources for fighting back are not available.

8. Mandated change can result in the "selective involvement" of participants.

9. Mandated change can result in passive resistance and dulled compliance when opportunities to escape and resources for fighting back are not available.

10. Conflict sociology forms a useful theoretical framework for the explanation of mandated CBTE and organizational conflict.

11. Groups with varying goals and approaches to the resolution of problems exhibit a high potential for conflict when coerced into collaboration.

12. Conflict within organizations' ability to effectively relate to other organizations when coersed into collaboration.

This listing show two categories of conclusions which resulted from the study. The first nine conclusions all reflect results observed due to the mandated change. The second category of conclusions deal specifically with the theoretical framework utilized to explain the event.

The first category (those conclusions dealing with the mandate) primarily result from the descriptive data. These data clearly substantiate the contention that the mandated change generated substantial conflict and was characterized by the use of coercion on the part of many groups.

Clearly the coercive characteristic of the entire process of program development led to inefficient utilization of resources and expertise. The collaborative approach to teacher education was greatly hindered by the SED decision to establish CBTE as the only acceptable teaching format for the preparation of teachers in New York State.

What is also quite clear from the data is that CBTE actually became a struggle over control of the process of training teachers. This event was a study in conflict, coercion, and power not a study of collaboration and consensus. The entire educational system became engulfed in struggle for control.

Conflict Sociology is a useful means of analysis for inter and intra organizational relationships. Clearly, Conflict Sociology served to explain the described event and the behavior of its participants. Also this application of Conflict Sociology proved beneficial inexplaining relationships between organizations as well as within them. Every significant act and activity engaged in by the participants in this study was accurately explained by Conflict Sociology.

A final conclusion of this study is that theory which is useful can be generated from descriptive data collected through the use of a process documentation approach. This generation of theory, grounded in data, indicates the need and utility of an inductive, qualitative approach to the study of organizations and social phenomena.

Summary

The utilization of qualitative methods to describe the characteristics of an event, combined with the inductive explanation of the event though the generation of new theory on the utilization of existing theory is a very valuable approach for organizational analysis. All organizational theorists and educators could benefit from the relevant application of qualitative methodologies to analyze complex organizational events.

References

Beals, Alan R., and Bernard J. Siegel. Divisiveness and Social Conflict. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966.

Bernard, Jesse. "Parties and Issues in Conflict," Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. I, No. 2 (June 1957).

Bernard, Jessee, T.H. Pear, et al. The Nature of Conflict. New York UNESCO, 1956.

Brumbaugh, Robert E. "Territoriality: Necessary Concept in Conflict Theories of Organizations?" Paper addressed at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 2-6, 1970.

Chamblis, William J., Editor. Sociological Readings in the Conflict Perspective. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1973.

Cody, Wilmer S. "Governance, Accountability and Evaluation in Education Discussed in the Content of a Tension Model." Paper presented to April 1974.

Collins, Randall. Conflict Sociology, Toward an Explanatory Science. New York, New York, Academic Free Press, 1975.

Dahrendorf, Ralf. Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Eliot, Thomas. "Toward an Understanding of Public School Politics," American Political Science Review (1959).

Fincher, Cameron. "On the Rational Solution of Dominant Issures in Higher Education." Journal of Higher Education, XLVI, No. 5, 1975.

Glaser, Berney G. Anselm L. Strauss. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. CHICAGO: Aldne and Atherton 1067.

Lenski, Gerhard. "The Nature of Society" appearing in Sociological Readings in the Conflict Perspective, William Chamblis, Editor. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1973

Lofland, John. Analyzing Social Settings. Belmont, California Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971

Lutz, Frank W. "Why Teacher Militancy," IRS Journal, Vol. I, 1969.

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. "The Forces of Social Change" appearing in Sociological Readings in the Conflict Perspective, William Chamblis, Editor. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1973.

North, Robert, "Violence: Interpersonal, Intergroups, and Internatonal." Diable Valley Education Project, October 15, 1969.

Rosner, Benjamin. The Power of Competency Based Teacher Education: A Report. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1972

Schalock, H. Del. "The Focus of Performance Based Certification: Knowledge, Teaching Behavior, or the Products that Derive From A Teacher's Behavior" paper to Performance Based Certification Conference, Florida State, Department of Education, May 1970.

Sederburg, William A. "A Conflict Over Educational Accountability," Kappa Delta Pi, Vol. II, No. 3 (February 1973)